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Press Briefing by Dr. Condoleezza Rice

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DR. RICE: Today, as you probably heard, the United States and the United Kingdom and Spain today put down a draft resolution -- a resolution before the Security Council that is an affirmation of the Council's willingness to uphold 1441, a resolution that was passed in November. The purpose of this resolution is to clearly state what we believe to be obvious, which is that Saddam Hussein, having been given one final opportunity to comply with the disarmament obligations that he undertook back in 1991 in order to end a war of aggression which he began, that he has, as the resolution says, "decides that Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded to it in Resolution 1441."

That's really the critical line. It simply states that he failed to take the opportunity afforded to him in 1441, and in that sense, is an affirmation of the willingness of the Council to enforce its own resolutions and to stand up for its own resolutions.

We expect that over the next period of time there will be discussion of this resolution. I'm sure it's already being discussed, and it will be discussed among members. People will talk to capitals. And Hans Blix will report on March 7th, as you know, and we would expect that not too long after that, there will need to be a decision about the resolution.

So, with that, I will --

Q Dr. Rice, if the resolution is passed, would the United States government interpret it as being an authorization for military action?

DR. RICE: As you know, we believe that the authorization to enforce the United Nations Security Council resolutions exist already in a number of resolutions, going all the way back to 1991. And I would just remind everybody that 1441 makes very clear that further material breach by Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with 1441 would bring serious consequences. So we believe the authorization is already there.

Q What does that one line actually mean? And why did you decide to do a resolution that has -- that's one page long and has only one new sentence in it?

DR. RICE: Resolution 1441 is a very powerful resolution. And Resolution 1441 says all that there is about the need for Iraq to comply, about the obligations that Iraq undertook when it ended the war -- when the war was ended in 1991, and the new obligations that were placed on Iraq were full and complete compliance with 1441, back in November when it was passed. So it wasn't necessary to have a long resolution; it was just important to reference 1441, which is a very powerful resolution in its own right.

And I might just note that the "whereas" clauses preceding that last line point, for instance, to the important operative paragraphs like the importance of filing a full and complete declaration, and then providing full cooperation to UNMOVIC, neither of which Iraq has done.

Q But you didn't -- I mean, you could have said in that sentence, for instance, that they are now and continue to be in material breach, but did not. It appears that this was an effort to get a resolution that would be as small a target as possible for those who were inclined not to make a decision at this point.

DR. RICE: I would call it an efficient resolution, in that it is very clearly linked to everything that everybody agreed to in 1441. And so if you agreed to 1441, and you have to agree that Iraq did not file a full and complete declaration, which I think is now common wisdom, and if you have to agree that Iraq is not fully cooperating and complying with

the obligations that it undertook in 1441 -- for instance, refusing -- still refusing to have scientists interviewed privately, still refusing to make available documentation for a whole variety of past programs that are unaccounted for, negotiating with the inspectors about how the U-2 will fly -- if you accept that, then you have to accept that they're not in full compliance. You have to accept that they failed to take their final opportunity. And I would think it would be hard to vote against this.

Q If this did not pass, you would then be in the position of having everybody in agreement on 1441, but having the Security Council on the record as not having approved the resolution that he was -- had turned down his final chance. That would seem to make it more difficult for you to do what you said many times you would do, which is go ahead and enforce it with a coalition of the willing. Are you willing to be in a position where you are running contrary to the Security Council if you did lose? And what would constitute victory here? Nine votes and a veto? Nine votes and no veto?

DR. RICE: Well, obviously, we would like to have the Security Council uphold the obligations that it undertook when it passed 1441 unanimously. Again, if he's not filed a full, complete, and fair declaration -- which he did not on December 8th -- and if he is not fully cooperating in his own disarmament, if he's trying to turn the inspectors, instead, into detectives, then he's not in compliance with 1441. And this resolution simply notes in the language of 1441 that that will have meant that he has passed on his final opportunity to comply.

We will see what people do. But again, it's hard for me to understand how you can vote for 1441, witness what has gone on from December -- or from November until now, and argue the converse of this, that he has taken advantage of his final opportunity to comply.

Q I'm not sure that was responsive to the question, though. The question is, if you don't have a victory -- first of all, if you can define victory -- but if you don't have a victory, are you ready to be -- to run counter to a vote --

DR. RICE: Well, the President has made very clear that the Security Council needs to act and that, if the Security Council is unable to act, then we will have to act with a coalition of the willing. It's -- again, David, the language of this says he's not taken advantage of his final opportunity to comply. It's going to be awfully hard to argue that he has taken advantage of his final opportunity to comply. And so the Security Council is, I think, now on -- is now there and must really take a decision to see whether or not it's going to enforce its own resolutions.

And I can't define victory for you. Victory will be if the -- victory for the Security Council will be if it is able to carry out its obligations to enforce its resolutions.

Q The President at one point didn't think a second resolution was necessary; now that's the argument that France and Germany have taken up. So I have two questions. First of all, what argument now does the U.S. make to sort of get around that argument, that we don't need this? And then, secondly, if Iraq turns over the missiles for destruction before this is -- how much higher is your mountain then to try to get this resolution passed, because then France and Germany could argue, see, some weapons have been destroyed?

DR. RICE: It's been the position of the United States all along that we didn't need a second resolution. But as the President said, it would be welcome to have a second resolution that would once again affirm that the Security Council is prepared to enforce its own resolutions. And so that's the purpose of this.

It was also, of course, important for a number of other countries that we seek a second resolution. I think you know that for a number of our closest allies it was an important step to take. And so, while we still don't believe that it was necessary -- all the authorization necessary was in 1441 and previous resolutions -- it seemed a wise thing to do, and it does give people a chance to affirm, one more time, not the second resolution, but you know, depending on how you count, the 18th resolution that calls on Saddam Hussein's regime to comply.

As to missile destruction, it would be a good thing if he destroyed these missiles, because 687 requires that he does. It's obvious that the inspectors have decided that they are proscribed, they are beyond the prohibited -- the proscribed range. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. That's just the beginning of a long list of things that would constitute disarmament. Because, after all, we're talking about missing anthrax and missing botulinum toxin and missing VX and missing sarin gas. We're talking about a long list of documents that are missing to give any confidence to the world as to what happened to all of those deadly -- we're talking about biological -- mobile biological weapons labs that have -- now we have confirmation from several sources exist that Saddam Hussein continues to hide. So there's a long list of disarmament tasks.

Q But wouldn't it give the momentum to the other side, though, if the -- now maybe they'll get the anthrax.

DR. RICE: I think the problem -- and we can just expect this to happen over the next couple weeks, I can absolutely predict that it's going to happen over the next couple weeks -- that Saddam Hussein will do what he's done over the last 12 years. Whenever he's under tremendous pressure, he puts forward a little cooperation in hopes that he can release the pressure. And then he goes back to cheating and retreating and deceiving again. And then, when things get a little hot again, he puts forward a little bit more cooperation.

What 1441 says is full and complete compliance with his disarmament obligations; 1441 says one final opportunity to comply. It does not say, one final opportunity to cooperate a little bit, or final opportunity to make a little bit of progress, or final opportunity to offer up one of your weapons programs. It says, total and complete. And so, it's not going to be acceptable this time, this game.

Q Condi, a little bit about the fact that CBS is reporting based on an interview that, in fact, this is maybe a moot point because he's saying that he's not going to destroy the Al Samoud missiles. What's --

DR. RICE: Well, he's been in contempt for the last 12 years. I guess he intends to continue to be in contempt on that issue, as well as the many, many others in which he's in contempt.

Q Dr. Rice, pass or fail, will the vote on this resolution signal the end -- the exhaustion of all diplomatic options here? How is your work over the next three weeks complicated by the resolution -- or the package that the French and the Germans put on the table today, and the Chinese have apparently supported? And in terms of final opportunities for diplomacy, will it be helpful for the President to meet face to face with some of these leaders in the interim?

DR. RICE: Well, I've not seen the package that the other parties put on the table. I've seen reports of some elements of it. But what it says to me is that it's a strong admittance that what is happening now is not working; that the inspectors are not getting the kind of cooperation that they need; that Saddam Hussein is not disarming; that he is not voluntarily complying and that somehow more inspectors or monitors or more effort is somehow going to make him comply. And I just think it's illogical to believe that he is going to somehow comply in the face of more monitors when he isn't complying, given the pressures of 1441, given the force buildup in the region.

It seems to me that you have the worst of both worlds. You've admitted that the -- that 1441 is not being complied with, but you're trying to somehow alter and play with 1441 to make him more capable of complying with it. I don't think it's going to work, and I don't -- and it's certainly is not of interest. What we need here is for the Iraqis to fully and completely disarm, or for the Security Council to do what it needs to do and enforce its own resolutions.

Q Will he be meeting face to face with some of these leaders?

DR. RICE: The President has met face to face with a lot of people recently. Just with President Aznar,; and he's, of course, been with Prime Minister Blair, and Prime Minister Berlusconi. I'm sure he's open to meeting with anybody. But he's been on the telephone a lot with a lot of leaders, as well as has Secretary Powell. I have, and a number of people have. So the diplomacy will be very intense in this period of time, and we'll see what we think may be effective.

Q I'm sorry, can I just follow up?

DR. RICE: Yes.

Q You describe this second resolution as efficient. Could it also be described as artful in this sense that it is, in your view, boxing in those opponents to this resolution? They're boxing in, in the sense that they are linked to 1441 which they approved, and therefore, if they veto it, as David raises, that you feel like you've got a ready-made argument to say, what are you vetoing? Are you vetoing yourself?

DR. RICE: I just think that that's the case. The case is that 1441 was a resolution -- was unanimously approved, and Saddam Hussein has, by nobody's calculation, complied with 1441. He didn't file a complete and fair declaration. He isn't cooperating actively with the inspectors. He's making some faint cooperation on process, but on substance there remain myriad unanswered questions. So you can't argue that he's complying. This says he's not complying with 1441. It seems to me that if you voted for 1441, it's hard to vote against this.

Q Dr. Rice, I'm sorry, could I ask you to come back to Bob's first question whether the vote, pass or fail, represents the exhaustion of the last diplomatic option --

DR. RICE: Yes, I'm sorry, I didn't answer that. There may be other options that people will want to explore, but the focus has to be now on disarming Saddam Hussein and making certain that he can no longer threaten international peace and security. Anything that does not achieve that, the world should not be willing to settle for.

Q But there may be other --

DR. RICE: Well, there have been those who have talked about his leaving, and I don't know if that is a possibility. But there are those who have talked about his leaving. But what I can assure you is that there are no deals to be struck here with the Iraqi leadership. There are no deals to be struck here about just a little bit of compliance or a schedule for compliance, or something along those lines. And the sorts of things that he was able to do in '96, I think there's no room for those.

Q So when you say, talk about the focus shifting -- talking about your focus shifting to forcibly disarming him if he's still there?

DR. RICE: It is hard to imagine any other way, if he has failed to voluntarily disarm, to disarm him except forcibly.

Q What is your strategy for getting up to nine votes? Do you hope to pick off Russia and China and isolate France, or some other strategy? What are you --

DR. RICE: Well, we're going to work with everybody. We aren't counting votes and saying, well, that one is off limits, or that vote can't be won. Since people voted 15-0 for 1441, the logic of it is that we ought to be able to get votes for this resolution, as well, because this resolution is so clearly in support of 1441.

So we'll have an all-out diplomatic effort -- we and the British and the Spanish and others will have an all-out diplomatic effort to talk to various parties about the logic of this resolution, and hopefully to bring people around to vote for it. But I wouldn't, at this point, say that we believe any vote is off limits.

Q It seems clear to the Americans and the British that 1441 is not being complied with, and you have a majority of the members of the Council, at this point, seem willing to let the inspections continue. Is there a sense that you're being too artful in your language here? You're getting resolutions that, in the case of 1441, all of the members of the Security Council can agree with, and yet all don't agree on whether Iraq is complying with it. Blair had the same problem with the newest resolution.

DR. RICE: I don't hear very many people saying he's complied with 1441. I've heard arguments about more time, or more inspectors. The paper that was put down today -- if it contains what I've been told it contains -- again suggests that 1441 isn't working; therefore, we have to try something different. So I don't think anybody is saying he's complying with 1441.

Our point is, and the point of the British and others, and the reason that we believe it was time to bring this now, is that he should not be allowed to play this game for an infinite amount of time, trying to split the Council, trying to play public opinion, continuing to cheat and retreat like he's done since 1991.

And if there's a difference, I think it's about the timing. But I don't think anybody would argue that that declaration was full and fair and complete, or that he is complying. All you have to do is look at the reports that Drs. Blix and ElBaradei have made, that talk about the need for more active cooperation, that talk about the need for the Iraqis to actually comply, that if the Iraqis were actually complying, then this job could get done. But the Blix and ElBaradei reports don't talk about an Iraq that is fully complying with 1441.

Q So if the difference is about the timing, then why doesn't the resolution address that, set a deadline?

DR. RICE: Because Saddam Hussein has had plenty of deadlines in his life. The main thing here is to get everybody focused on bringing this to a conclusion, because the world has waited not three months or four months, it has waited 12 years. The Iraqi people continue to live under sanctions in an abnormal condition because for 12 years the international community has been unable to deal with Saddam Hussein's defiance.

We all continue to live under the threat of continued programs of weapons of mass destruction linked to someone who's got links to terrorism. It's time to deal with this problem. And so it should be very clear by now that when the

President said, weeks, not months, he really did mean, weeks, not months.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, let's make this the last question.

Q All that diplomatic effort you talk about, some of the countries whose votes you need are either very dependent on American friendship, or particularly benefit from it. What are the consequences for a Mexico, a Chile, or an Angola voting against this resolution? What are you telling them?

DR. RICE: Well, we're going to try to convince people that their responsibilities as members of the Security Council necessitate a vote that will strengthen the role of the Security Council in international politics, not weaken it. Because we've got a lot of tough issues ahead of us. As you know, North Korea was just referred to the Security Council. There are going to be a lot of difficult issues. The IAEA is trying to make sense of what's going on in Iran. The international community has a lot of hard work to do on weapons of mass destruction. And so we're going to try to convince people that the Security Council needs to be strong here.

This is an important issue, a critically important issue for the United States, because the President of the United States believes very strongly that the American people are under threat, that American security interests are under threat, and that world peace and security is threatened by Saddam Hussein. So no one should underestimate the importance of this issue for the United States and the importance of America's resolve in getting this done.

But we'll talk to people, and we'll make both the case about the U.N. Security Council and the importance of this issue to the United States.

Q Two very quick questions. One is, have you got any readout from Russia, I guess, your ally in this process, about Mr. Primakov's visit to Baghdad? And, secondly, I'm not clear about the timing issue. As you say, you identify that's the big issue for the Europeans, and you are effectively setting a deadline by saying you would like to get this addressed in the U.N. the week after March the 7th. Why not do what you did in 1441, which was allow it to string out for a few extra weeks, and bring the whole world on board?

DR. RICE: Well, 1441 was a different kind of resolution. There was, frankly, a lot to discuss and negotiate about 1441: what would be the precise character of the weapons inspections, how were you strengthening the weapons inspectors. There were just a lot of issues that had to be dealt with in 1441. But this is not a resolution that lends itself to that kind of discussion. This is really now an up or down on whether or not the Security Council is going to enforce Resolution 1441. And so it doesn't lend itself to the same kinds of discussions.

But we're perfectly willing -- over the next period of time, we'll have the Blix report, and then shortly after we would hope to have a vote. But the diplomacy here is of a different character than what had to go into 1441, which was really constructing a new inspections regime in order to give Saddam Hussein one final opportunity to comply.

Resolution 1441 was a big departure from the way that the inspections regimes had been structured in the past. In the past they really had been trying to give the inspectors the ability to hunt and see what they could find, and to go into this palace or that palace. Resolution 1441 was designed as a very intensive test of Saddam Hussein's willingness to disarm. It was a test of whether or not he was going to behave like South Africa or Kazakhstan, and actually voluntarily disarm. And in that sense, there was a lot of work to be done on how to put together that kind of regime. This is a very different kind of resolution.

Q And Primakov?

DR. RICE: I've not gotten a readout. He's, I'm sure, reporting to Moscow. But we went through this in 1991. I was the Soviet specialist in 1991.

Q Dr. Rice, you were talking about exile as a one last possible diplomatic resolution. If we did see an exile situation, would the United States want to see Saddam Hussein tried before an international court?

DR. RICE: Look, I think that the -- this is something that the international community will have to discuss and come to terms with. My only point is that if -- if he wanted to leave and give his people a chance to build a better life, I think that is something that the world would applaud at this point.

Q Would we help him?

DR. RICE: Something the international community would need to discuss. But there are several things that would

still need to be done. And a post-Saddam Iraq, however that happens, has to deal with the weapons of mass destruction and the disarmament of the country; has to deal -- has to ensure the territorial integrity of Iraq; has to ensure that sectarian violence does not break out; and needs to put the Iraqi people on a path toward a more democratic future. And those goals remain, however one gets to a post-Saddam Iraq, if we do.

Q On exile, do you have any more indication that it is a viable possibility than you all had in the past couple of weeks?

DR. RICE: No.

All right, thank you very much.

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